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Sustaining Columbia's Vital Mission

April 14, 2025



Dear Members of the Columbia Community:

Over the past few weeks, days, indeed over the past few hours, you have no doubt seen and heard much about Columbia and the future of higher education. This is an extraordinary and difficult time for our University. We face unprecedented pressures, with no easy answers and many uncertainties. That combination is creating significant anxiety for our community, and we must, as we navigate this moment, stay true to our core mission as an educational and research institution, and true to our community.

I've heard deep concern about when and whether we will get our research funding back, what form an agreement with the government would take, whether we would have to compromise our values to reach such an agreement, and what we're doing to support our international students right now. Let me attempt to address each of these issues.


As we have shared before, the University has been engaged in what we continue to believe to be good faith discussions with the Federal Task Force to Combat Antisemitism. We have sought to address allegations of antisemitism, harassment, and discrimination on our campuses, and provide a path to restoring a partnership


with the federal government that supports our vital research mission, while also protecting the University's academic and operational integrity and independence.

Those discussions have not concluded, and we have not reached any agreement with the government at this point. Some of the government's requests have aligned with policies and practices that we believe are important to advancing our mission, particularly to provide a safe and inclusive campus community. I stand firmly behind the commitments we outlined on March 21, and all the work that has been done to date. Other ideas, including overly prescriptive requests about our governance, how we conduct our presidential search process, and how specifically to address viewpoint diversity issues are not subject to negotiation.

To be clear, our institution may decide at any point, on its own, to make difficult decisions that are in Columbia's best interests. Any good institution must do that. Where the government – or any stakeholder – has legitimate interest in critical issues for our healthy functioning, we will listen and respond. But we would reject heavy-handed orchestration from the government that could potentially damage our institution and undermine useful reforms that serve the best interests of our students and community. We would reject any agreement in which the government dictates what we teach, research, or who we hire. And yes, to put minds at ease, though we seek to continue constructive dialogue with the government, we would reject any agreement that would require us to relinquish our independence and autonomy as an educational institution.

Like many of you, I read with great interest the message from Harvard refusing the federal government's demands for changes to policies and practices that would strike at the very heart of that university's venerable mission. In this moment, a continued public conversation about the value and principles of higher education is enormously useful. I am especially concerned that many Americans have lost faith and trust in higher education. We should continue the hard work of understanding why. At the same time, we must more clearly explain what we here, at Columbia, know instinctively about the vital contributions we make to the world.

I want to turn to our international students, who are essential to our unique and powerful ecosystem, and who are experiencing enormous distress. We have been following with great concern the various actions being taken by the federal government toward members of our community. We know this has provoked not only anxiety, but multiple new, day-to-day challenges for our international student community. For that reason, the University launched a [new University fund](#) , supported by my office, our Board of Trustees, and generous alumni, to assist students who need help managing unanticipated expenses and other challenges right now.

This comes alongside our recently announced commitment of additional resources to our International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) to expand their ability to help our international students, through logistical, legal, and mental health support, including a significant expansion of hours and staff resources. I'm pleased to announce a [new website](#)  dedicated to these efforts.

We are navigating a turbulent time for higher education. The challenges ahead of us are formidable. Knowing Columbia as I do, and as you do, I am confident that we *will* get through this to serve our students, faculty, staff, and society for centuries to come.

Sincerely,

Claire Shipman
Acting President, Columbia University in the City of New York